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LOCAL STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS IN SWITZERLAND

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Abstract

The chapter on Switzerland presents some of the few institutionalized forms of local state-society networks, since local state-society relations in this highly decentralized country tend to rest upon informal exchange and practices of direct democratic participation. Two widespread exceptions are local school committees as well as local tourism organizations, where such networks include municipal executive councilors as well as societal representatives of the citizenry, parents and school professionals, and/or the business community respectively. While consultative school committees introduced in three French speaking cantons can be considered as self-reflective bodies with limited autonomy and relevance, more traditional school boards as well as local tourism organizations reflect the consociational political culture that is ubiquitous also in the many informal ways of policy making in Switzerland.

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The Swiss political system is world-renowned for its extensive use of direct democracy (Altman, 2011), its federal and highly decentralized structure (Ladner, Keuffer, and Baldersheim, 2015), and its consensual politics that is most notable in the stable national multi-party government (Lijphart, 1999). At the local level, Swiss municipalities have triggered scholarly attention for the long direct democratic tradition of town meetings in more rural areas (Barber, 1974; Mansbridge, 1980) and for the intensive use of direct-democratic ballots also in more urban municipalities, where they were introduced from the late 19th century onwards (Bützer, 2007, pp. 38–9).

Switzerland serves as an example of the ‘civic localist infrastructure’ identified by Sellers and Kwak (2011). Interactions between citizens and municipal councilors or municipal officials are hardly perceived as ‘state-society’ relations, given that municipal self-government in the highly fragmented Swiss municipal landscape is performed mainly through the citizens themselves, elected to the executive council and various executive committees (e.g., the municipal school board). The state, in contrast, is associated first and foremost with the cantonal and only secondarily with the federal government (Vatter, 2002, p. 18).

With regard to interest intermediation by organized groups, the Swiss national political system has sometimes been considered as corporatist, although qualified as ‘liberal corporatism’ due to the dominant role of trade unions in policy implementation and weak and fragmented labor unions (Katzenstein, 1985). A more balanced corporatism can be found at the subnational level of the 26 cantons, particularly in the policy fields of health, education and – in reaction to EU labor immigration – also when a canton declares bilateral tariff agreements in

particular branches as binding (Vatter, 2014). At the municipal level, however, we hardly find any formalized pre-legislative consultations with interest groups, but rather ad-hoc public consultations and workshops, particularly in the field of planning. Informal bilateral contacts, (the threat of) initiatives or referenda or an engaged plea at a town meeting are thus the usual way for (organized) interests to impact upon local policy making.

Against this background, also institutionalized local state-society networks – the focus of this book – are not the dominant way for addressing policy issues in the non-EU country Switzerland. In the wake of federal activating labor market policy, tripartite committees were introduced in 2003 for advising the 150 regional employment agencies ('RAV') across the country.¹ However, these committees do not involve representatives from the local authorities. At the level of municipalities, single executive councilors are involved in the foundation boards of retirement and care homes and in the executive boards of care organisations ('Spitex'), although we would hardly subsume this form of co-management under the term of state-society relations. Moreover, we see ad-hoc expert committees for particular projects, yet without long-term institutionalization. Similarly, the spatial planning regions created in the 1960s and 1970s are often structured as inter-municipal associations ('Regionalplanungsverbände'), such platforms also being incentivized by the federal agglomeration program (Kaiser et al., 2016). Yet these platforms consist merely of municipal representatives, with only ad-hoc consultations with other societal actors. Inversely, chambers of commerce and trade associations do not generally involve municipal executive councilors in their executive boards. Although some municipalities and cities have introduced youth parliaments and – very rarely – foreign residents' advisory councils, their institutional linkage with local government is minimal.

Nonetheless, there are two forms of institutionalized state-society networks that are actually very widespread in Switzerland:

- 1) Some forms of local school committees (traditional and mandatory in most cantons)
- 2) Local tourism organizations (widespread in the touristic parts of the country)

These two cases are well suited for investigating the characteristics of institutionalized state-society networks in Switzerland, even though we need to keep in mind that local state-society relations in general tend to rest upon informal exchange and practices of direct democratic participation.

LOCAL SCHOOL COMMITTEES

Almost all cantons have traditionally prescribed that public schools need to be lead and supervised by a local school board (independent from the municipal council), directly elected by the local citizens entitled to vote (for an overview see EDK, 2009).² They usually consist of five or more laymen citizens engaged on a honorary basis, with one of them elected president of the school board. While school buildings and their maintenance is usually in the responsibility of the municipal council and the salaries of the educational staff are co-financed by the canton and the municipality, the management and supervision of schools has traditionally been the sole responsibility of the school board. Due to the small size of some municipalities, in some cantons we find an increased use of inter-municipal associations (for secondary and/or lower grade) with a common school board composed solely by citizen representatives and a separate presidential board composed of local authority representatives only.³

Given the rising societal expectations and the ongoing professionalization of school management since the 1990s (introduction of professional school heads – ‘geleitete Schulen’), combined with increasing recruitment problems, their right for existence has been increasingly questioned (Dlabac, 2016). Several cantons have made them optional⁴ or abolished them altogether⁵ – with the possibility of establishing a purely advisory school committee responding

directly to the municipal council. In the case of their canton-wide abolishment, however, establishing an advisory school committee has been a rather seldom choice.⁶

A special case is the ‘Conseil d’établissement scolaire’ that has recently been introduced in three French speaking cantons⁷, inspired by the equally named institution that was installed in France already in the 1990’s (Buser and Nöpfl, 2016). It is a mixed body composed by delegates from the local executive council, the schoolchildren’s parents and the corps of teachers and other professionals, located either at the municipal or inter-municipal level.⁸ These bodies are consultative only, but by institutionalizing the relations between various stakeholders and the local municipal council it clearly constitutes an institutionalized state-society network that we can investigate in terms of its characteristics.

Less far-reaching reforms we find in the cantons with traditionally very autonomous school boards. Six out of the 26 cantons have known a separate territorial structure, the so called ‘school municipality’ (‘Schulgemeinde’).⁹ These school municipalities do not necessarily correspond to the territory of the ‘political municipalities’ and they are entitled to raise their own finances by having its separate citizen assembly decide on its own tax share (a separate ‘school tax’ rate). What we observe here, however, is a trend towards integrating the school boards into the municipal executive council by dissolving the school municipality into the political municipality.¹⁰ In these ‘unitary municipalities’ (‘Einheitsgemeinden’), a political executive councilor is at the same time member of the – usually¹¹ – directly elected school board, often presiding it in the position of the school president, and school finances are then administered by the political executive council.¹² These semi-autonomous school boards in these newly merged unitary municipalities constitute another ideal example for investigating institutionalized state-society relations in Switzerland.

The autonomy of local school committees, where they exist, varies largely between cantons.

It is highest in the cantons where school municipalities constitute a parallel municipal structure with extensive financial autonomy, and it is weakest in cantons where they are merely a representation of parents at municipal level used for consultation and information by the local executive council. Since none of these extreme forms constitutes an institutionalized network involving simultaneously local executive councilors as well as societal actors, we focus the discussion on the two special forms delineated above that actually constituting an institutionalized state-society network. A) The semi-autonomous local school board that has traditionally disposed of vast political and financial independence, but is now joined and often presided by a local political councilor as well as depending on municipal finances. B) The consultative ‘Conseil d’établissement scolaire’ composed of political, societal and professional representatives.

In both cases, having a local school committee is mandatory by cantonal laws and thus initiated by the ‘state’, that is, by the canton. In case A), however, having the particular form of a unitary municipality (the school board integrated into the political executive council) was usually preceded by mutual agreement between the municipal council and the school board confirmed by a popular vote. Since the school committees in both these cases are usually presided by a local executive councilor¹³, it is usually the municipal representative coordinating the committee. Both cases also coincide in having their internal rules defined by majority decisions. The considerable autonomy that the school boards still have – and the consultative mixed committees do not – comes from their independent composition and legitimacy deriving from direct citizen election and ample freedom in terms of their statutory rules that they define by a majority vote.

The *coherence of both forms of local school committees is quite high*. While the consultative committees are composed mainly by group representatives (delegates from executive council, parents, teaching corps) with some discretion in their mandate, the school boards are composed mainly by elected individuals with a free mandate, complemented by a representative of the executive council. All of them share common beliefs with the specific target of securing good learning conditions for every pupil, including motivated teachers and good school-parent relationships.

Mirroring the differences in the autonomy, the *relevance of the selected two form of school committees differs greatly*. Even though the school boards integrated in the local council lost the extensive financial powers enjoyed earlier, they still are considered as equal partners to the school boards. Equally, although the substance and scope of impact has decreased in a context where management powers have been delegated to professional school heads, their role for legitimizing and anchoring the schools in local society is still widely acknowledged in these cantons. The mixed school committee found in some French speaking cantons, in contrast, is a purely consultative body, with the executive council having the possibility of delegating some tasks to the committee. Also, while the matter of school governance potentially affects considerable shares of the population, the scope of impact and the public awareness of the committees' deliberations can be considered as rather limited (Buser and Näpfl, 2016).

To summarize, the two different forms of school committees clearly expose different traits and accordingly belong to different types of institutionalized state-society networks. In case A), where traditionally strong local school boards have been integrated with the political executive council (unitary municipalities), the newly institutionalized state-society networks can be labelled as consociational, embodying nicely the Swiss political culture with extensive local self-government, consensus-oriented political negotiation and meaningful societal

participation. Contrary to this, the consultative mixed school committees (case B) newly introduced in three cantons correspond rather to a self-reflective network centering on the creation of coherence among all stakeholders, revealing a more centralized and to some extent more technocratic approach to school governance that can be discerned for the French speaking part of Switzerland (Buser and Nöpfl, 2016).

LOCAL TOURISM ORGANIZATIONS

Throughout the touristic locations of Switzerland, many municipalities have local tourism organizations in order to promote tourism and coordinate activities and touristic infrastructure within a municipality or an area covering several municipalities. There are around 135 local tourism organizations registered as members with the national tourism association¹⁴, while the total number of local tourism organizations is unknown. These organizations are usually organized as simple private associations, thus following the regulations of the federal civil code (*Zivilgesetzbuch, Art. 60 ff.*). Their funding usually consists of the local tourist taxes, fees of association members and commercial services and activities. The associations have an executive board with usually five or more members, as well as some active and some passive members meeting at a yearly general assembly that is entitled to elect the president or the entire board. Usually these boards involve a representative from the municipal executive council (or from several municipal executive councils) and representatives from the citizenry or more specifically from the various economic branches like hotels, restaurants, second-home owners, service companies, transport companies, sport facilities and possibly local retailers. Sometimes the statutes foresee that the executive board constitutes itself, that the board nominates the candidates, or it list the detailed associations that are to nominate some candidates for election through the general assembly.¹⁵

More professionalized organizations might even nominate a CEO and employees, and they may take the form of a corporation for offering their marketing services, information centres and possibly the maintenance of hiking and ski trails and slopes.¹⁶ There are even some noteworthy recent cases where all enterprises of a touristic area become merged into and managed by one single holding.¹⁷

The autonomy of local tourism organizations is very high. They are voluntary and usually jointly initiated by the local executive council (or multiple councils) and societal actors or associations mainly from the local tourism related economic sector. The president of the executive board, having a central coordinating role, usually comes from the economic sector. The association's own statutes, as defined by simple majority decisions, stipulate the composition and rules.

Moreover, the *coherence of local tourism organizations is rather high.* In addition to some municipal councilor, the executive board consists of either elected individuals with considerable discretion in smaller touristic locations, or group actors (companies or associations) in the larger touristic hotspots. Group actors as well have some discretion in their mandate, unless decisions would critically affect the companies and other stakeholders represented by them. Board members meet on a regular basis. Successful strategic agreement and internal coordination presupposes mutual trust between the board members, and the actors more specifically share the belief that the positioning of their location in the highly competitive international market for tourists requires joined efforts and a coordinated strategy on behalf of public and private actors alike.

The relevance of the local tourism organizations is arguably very high, particularly in locations and areas where large shares of the residents depend on tourism. Public and private actors engage actively under the principle of partnership. Since the financial crisis of 2008 at

the latest, Swiss alpine touristic places are facing tremendous challenges by cheap long-distance travels, lacking investments, warm winters and a soaring Swiss Franc¹⁸. Yet it is particularly in these times when successful action by tourism organizations is widely considered as critical for keeping an area on the national and international map for tourists and investors.

Summing up in terms of the type of institutionalized state-society network, local tourism organizations in Switzerland can be labelled as strongly ‘consociational’. Their autonomy can be considered as even more pronounced than in the case of the school boards considered above, and the same is true also for their likely relevance. Although institutionalized local state-society relations are rare in Switzerland, both the school boards as well as the local tourism organizations thus reflect the strong consociational political culture that are ubiquitous also in the many informal ways how local political processes in Switzerland take societal concerns into account.

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Table 1: Network types of local state-society relations in Switzerland.

Name of the network	Dimension of the network																			Label of the network	
	Autonomy							Coherence						Relevance							
	Voluntary	Initiated	Coordinated	Statutory composition	Statutory rules	Statutory defined by	Rules Aggregated	Mandate	Stability	Actor types	Belief premises	Belief width	Aggregated	<i>Arnstein power</i>	Affected people	impact	Scope of awareness	Public	<i>Substance</i>		Aggregated
Local school committees:																					
A) School board in 'unitary municipalities'*	0	0	1	2	2	0.5	5.5	0	2	0	2	2	6	3.75	0.67	0.33	0.67	1.67	6.25	<i>consociational</i>	
B) Consultative mixed school committee **	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	2	9	1.25	0.67	0	0	0.67	0.83	<i>self-reflective</i>		
Local tourism organization	1	2	2	2	2	0.5	9.5	1	2	1	2	0	6	3.75	0.67	0.67	0.67	2	7.5	<i>consociational</i>	

Source: Own compilation. Shaded cells = aggregated score > 5. *School boards including local executive councilor ('unitary municipalities' in cantons Zurich, St. Gallen, Nidwalden, Glarus, and more rarely in the cantons of Thurgau and Appenzell Innerrhoden. **'Conseil d'établissement scolaire' (all municipalities/intermunicipal school associations in cantons Vaud, Geneva and Neuchâtel).

NOTES

- 1 These tripartite committees include representatives of employers, employees, and cantonal labor market agencies, with an advising role for public funding agencies and agencies for professional education (*Arbeitslosenversicherungsgesetz*, Art. 85d).
- 2 Local school boards are called ‘Schulpflege’, ‘Schulrat’, ‘Schulkommission’, ‘commission scolaire’ or ‘commissione scolastica’, depending on the canton.
- 3 This is mainly the case in the cantons of Argovia, Solothurn, Bern, Graubünden, Vaud, Valais, Fribourg, Ticino (compare survey by Ladner et al., 2013).
- 4 For example in the canton of Bern (*Volksschulgesetz*, revision from 2008), see Hangartner and Svaton (2015, p. 202).
- 5 The independent school boards have been abolished in the canton of Solothurn (2006), with similar plans envisaged currently by the government of the canton of Argovia.
- 6 In the case of the canton of Solothurn, where independent school boards have been abolished in 2006, as of 2018 only 11 out of 86 local authorities have introduced an optional advisory committee (Volksschulamt Kanton Solothurn, personal communication from 19 June 2018).
- 7 Namely the cantons of Vaud (2006), Geneva (2008), and Neuchâtel (2009), see Buser and Nöpfler (2016).
- 8 The ‘conseils d’établissement’ are located mainly at the municipal level in the cantons of Geneva and Neuchâtel and mainly at the inter-municipal level in the canton of Vaud.
- 9 Cantons of Zurich, Nidwalden, Glarus (until 2010), Appenzell Innerrhoden, St. Gallen, and Thurgau.
- 10 In the canton of Zurich, the share of these so called ‘unitary municipalities’ increased from 12 percent in 1975 to 56 percent (90 unitary municipalities) by 1.1.2019, see https://gaz.zh.ch/internet/justiz_inneres/gaz/de/gemeindeorganisation/gemeindefusion/grundlagen.html (accessed 9.4.2019). Similarly, in the canton of St. Gallen, until the early 1980’s only the cantonal capital had a unitary form, rising to 71 percent (55 unitary municipalities) by 1.1.2018 (https://www.gemeinden.sg.ch/home/zahlen_und_fakten/Zahlen_und_Fakten.html (accessed 9.4.2019)). In the canton Nidwalden, seven out of eleven municipalities have incorporated their school municipalities since 2010 (Kanton Nidwalden, 2018). In the canton of Glarus, the school municipalities have been dissolved in the course of its unprecedented cantonal territorial reform, merging all its 25 political municipalities including all school municipalities into three unitary municipalities in 2011. More hesitant are the municipalities in the cantons of Appenzell Innerrhoden and Thurgau. Only five out of 80 municipalities in Thurgau have merged with their corresponding school municipality since 1997 (<https://www.tagblatt.ch/ostschweiz/arbon-kreuzlingen-weinfeld/en/fuenf-einheitsgemeinden-im-thurgau-ld.743003>, accessed 9.4.2019). Only one (Oberegg) out of six municipalities in Appenzell Innerrhoden has introduced that form since 2012 (<https://www.ai.ch/themen/bildung/schulgemeinden>, accessed 9.4.2019).
- 11 In the canton of St. Gallen, in unitary municipalities the installment of a school committee is optional, and each municipality can decide upon its size and electoral body (*Gemeindegesez*, Art. 94).
- 12 In other cantons without the tradition of independent school municipalities, we also find provisions where members of the municipal executive council are *ex officio* also members of the school board. This is the case in Schaffhausen, Zug, and Obwalden (see EDK, 2009).

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- 13 A representative of the executive councilor needs to be the president of the committee in the canton of Vaud. In the other cantons, it is the choice of the municipality whether the political representative assumes the role of the president (see EDK, 2009).
 - 14 <https://www.stv-fst.ch/en/portrait/members> (accessed 5.3.2019)
 - 15 For example, the small association of Unterschächen/Klausenpass makes no suggestions as to the composition (http://www.unterschaechen.ch/fileadmin/dateien/dokumente/tourismus/stastuten_turismusverein.pdf; accessed 8.4.2019). The popular destination Leukerbad, in contrast, foresees a president, a representative of a consultative body formed by the executive councils of the involved municipalities, representatives of the public spa's, representatives of the touristic transport enterprises, representatives of the hotel and gastronomy association (HOGA), representatives of the association for holiday homes (FEWO), and a representative of the trade association (<https://www.leukerbad.ch/services/ueber-uns/weitere-dokumente/files13/statuten-leukerbad-tourismus.pdf>; accessed 26.2.2019).
 - 16 The large holiday region of Arosa-Lenzerheide serving as an example (https://arosalenzerheide.swiss/2-pdf/01_arosa/06_service/02_geschaeftsberichte/17-18_geschaeftsbericht.pdf; accessed 8.4.2019).
 - 17 For a news article on such a holding in Andermatt see <https://www.nzz.ch/meinung/warum-ander-matt-nicht-nacheifern-ld.1450295> (accessed 8.4.2019).
 - 18 See recent news article on the situation of the Swiss tourism market: <https://www.nzz.ch/meinung/touristiker-stehen-schlange-fuer-subventionen-ld.1418973> (accessed 8.4.2019).